

That which is claimed:

SUB A17

1. A system for searching for a contact comprising:
 - a database comprising a plurality of references to electronic directories, wherein said plurality comprises:
 - a first reference to a first electronic directory, wherein said first electronic directory comprises a standard electronic directory format, and
 - a second reference to a second electronic directory, wherein said second electronic directory comprises a non-standard electronic directory; and
 - a searching component in communication with said database
2. The system of claim 1, wherein each of said plurality of references comprises:
 - a location of an electronic directory;
 - a format descriptor of said electronic directory; and
 - a search descriptor of said electronic directory.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein said searching component comprises an executant on a web application server.
4. The system of claim 1, further comprising a directory entry display interface.
5. The system of claim 4, wherein a single executant comprises said searching component and said directory entry display interface.

6. The system of claim 1, further comprising a query format converter.

7. The system of claim 5, wherein said query format converter comprises a hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) querystring to lightweight directory access protocol (LDAP) query converter.

8. The system of claim 1, further comprising a display format converter.

9. A method for searching for a contact comprising:
receiving a search criterion;
searching a database comprising a plurality of references to electronic directories,
wherein said plurality comprises:
a first reference to a first electronic directory, wherein said first electronic directory comprises a standard electronic directory format, and
a second reference to a second electronic directory, wherein said second electronic directory comprises a non-standard electronic directory; and
iteratively performing the following steps a-c for each of said plurality of references:
a. connecting to an electronic directory to which said reference refers,
b. performing a search of said electronic directory, using said search criterion,
and

c. receiving a result of said search.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein each of said plurality of references comprises:
a location of an electronic directory;
a format descriptor of said electronic directory; and
a search descriptor of said electronic directory.

11. The method of claim 9, further comprising displaying a contact search user interface.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein after the step of receiving a result of said search, the method further comprises:
d. formatting said result; and
e. displaying said result in said contact search user interface.

13. The method of claim 11, further comprising:
accepting a selection of said result in said contact search user interface; and
in response to said selection, creating an email message addressed to an email address associated with said selection.

14. The method of claim 9, wherein after the step of searching said database, the method further comprises finding a directory.

15. The method of claim 9 further comprising:
searching for a directory of contacts; and
inserting a record corresponding to said directory in said database.

16. The method of claim 9, further comprising converting said search criterion into a format supported by said electronic directory.

17. The method of claim 9, further comprising billing for the use of said service.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said billing comprises billing a fixed amount per search.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein said billing comprises billing a fixed amount per time period.

20. The method of claim 9, wherein said search comprises a query selected from the group consisting of a fragment-matching query; a whole-word-matching query; and an exact-match query.

21. The method of claim 9, wherein said displaying further comprises filtering said result based on said search criterion.

22. A computer-readable medium on which is encoded computer program code for searching for a contact comprising:

computer program code for receiving a search criterion;

computer program code for searching a database containing a plurality of references to electronic directories, wherein said plurality comprises:

a first reference to a first electronic directory, wherein said first electronic directory comprises a standard electronic directory format, and

a second reference to a second electronic directory, wherein said second electronic directory comprises a non-standard electronic directory; and

computer program code for iteratively performing the following steps a-c for each of said plurality of references:

- connecting to an electronic directory to which said reference refers,
- performing a search of said directory, using said search criterion, and
- receiving a result of said search.

23. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein each of said plurality of references comprises:

a location of an electronic directory;

a format descriptor of said electronic directory; and

a search descriptor of said electronic directory.

24. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, further comprising computer program code for displaying a contact search user interface;

25. The computer-readable medium of claim 24, further comprising computer program code for performing the following steps d-e:

- d. formatting said result; and
- e. displaying said result in said contact search user interface.

26. The computer-readable medium of claim 24, further comprising:
computer program code for accepting a selection of said result in said contact search user interface; and
in response to said selection, computer program code for creating an email message addressed to an email address associated with said selection.

27. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, further comprising computer program code for finding a directory.

28. The computer-readable medium of claim 22 further comprising:
computer program code for searching for a directory of contacts; and
computer program code for inserting a record corresponding to said directory in said database.

29. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, further comprising computer program code for converting said search criterion into a format supported by the said electronic directory.

30. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, further comprising computer program code for billing for the use of said service.

31. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein said search comprises a query selected from the group consisting of a fragment-matching query; a whole-word matching query; and an exact-match query.

32. The computer-readable medium of claim 22, wherein said displaying further comprises program code for filtering said result based on said search criterion.